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Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 3792

EXDIS

DAMASCUS FOR SECRETARY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP (VANCE, CYRUS) LE
SUBJ: SOUTH LEBANON: CONVERSATIONS WITH FOREIGN MINISTER AND PRESIDENT

1. SUMMARY: FOLLOWING UNCLEARED WITH SECRETARY AND BASED ON AMBASSADOR'S NOTES. ON WAY FROM AIRPORT TO PRESIDENT'S PALACE, SECRETARY AND FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS HAD TWENTY-MINUTE CONVERSATION ON QUESTION OF SOUTH LEBANON. THIS WAS SUPPLEMENTED DURING CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT AND SUBJECT WAS REVIEWED AGAIN WITH FOREIGN MINISTER ON WAY BACK TO AIRPORT. IN BRIEF, LEBANESE ARE SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING DESPATCH OF MILITARY FORCES TO SOUTH AND IN MEANTIME ARE CAUTIOUS ABOUT COMMITING THEMSELVES REGARDING UN FORCE IDEA UNTIL THEY KNOW MORE ABOUT SYRIAN AND ISRAELI ATTITUDES. END SUMMARY.

2. CONVERSATION IN CAR STARTED WITH FONMIN BOUTROS ASKING SECRETARY WHAT HE THOUGHT OF PROPOSAL TO SEND UN FORCE TO SOUTH. SECRETARY SAID WE THOUGHT IT WAS A CONSTRUCTIVE IDEA AND WERE PREPARED TO SUPPORT IT. BOUTROS ASKED WHAT WE THOUGHT THE FORCE'S MISSION WOULD BE. SECRETARY SAID
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IT WOULD BE TO KEEP THE PEACE.

3. BOUTROS THEN ASKED WHETHER WE ENVISAGED THE FORCE AS BEING STATIONED ONLY ALONG THE BORDERS OR ALSO IN THE INTERIOR OF THE COUNTRY AS WELL. SECRETARY SAID BOUTROS WAS IN A BETTER POSITION THAN HE TO KNOW WHAT WAS NEEDED.

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4. BOUTROS SAID USE OF UN FORCE WOULD BE CHARACTERIZED BY MANY PEOPLE AS INTERNATIONALIZATION OF PROBLEM BETWEEN GOL AND PLO. SOME ARAB COUNTRIES WERE LIKELY TO OBJECT TO IT. SYRIA IN PARTICULAR MIGHT BE RELUCTANT TO SEE THIS HAPPEN BECAUSE OF ITS OWN ROLE IN LEBANON. UN FORCE COULD POSE DELICATE PROBLEMS FOR SYRIA.

5. SECRETARY ASKED WHAT ALTERNATIVES COULD BE. BOUTROS SAID HE HAD MET WITH GEN. KHOURY, COMMANDER OF LEBANESE ARMY THAT MORNING TO DISCUSS POSSIBILITIES. THEY HAD CONCLUDED THAT IF PLO COMMITMENT TO RESPECT CAIRO AGREEMENT HELD, AND IF THERE WAS A PALESTINIAN WITHDRAWAL FROM THE BORDERS IN SOME AREAS, AND IF ISRAEL DID NOT MOVE DIRECTLY OR THROUGH LOCAL ALLIES, IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO FREEZE SECURITY SITUATION AND THE ARMY WOULD BE ABLE TO TAKE OVER GRADUALLY. THEY COULD GET TOGETHER THREE BATTALIONS WHICH, SUPPLEMENTED BY INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES, MIGHT GIVE THEM 1000-1500 MEN. HE THOUGHT THEY COULD START MOVING MEN INTO POSITIONS IN THE SOUTH WITHIN TWO WEEKS.

6. BOUTROS THEN ASKED IF ISRAELI ACCEPTANCE OF UN FORCE WAS TIED TO A SETTLEMENT OR INDEPENDENT OF ONE. THE SECRETARY SAID IT WAS INDEPENDENT.

7. BOUTROS ASKED IF WE THOUGHT A PROPOSAL FOR UN
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FORCES WOULD BE APPROVED BY SECURITY COUNCIL. SECRETARY SAID HE HAS DISCUSSED THIS WITH WALDHEIM WHO WAS OPTIMISTIC.

8. BOUTROS SAID HE DID NOT WANT TO RULE OUT A UN FORCE. HE HAD NO OBJECTIONS TO THE IDEA PERSONALLY BUT WAS RAISING OBJECTIONS OTHERS MIGHT HAVE. SECRETARY ASKED IF BOUTROS THOUGHT THAT AUGMENTING UNSTO RATHER THAN SENDING IN SEPARATE FORCE WOULD BE USEFUL. BOUTROS SAID HE HAS DISCUSSED THIS IDEA WITH PRESIDENT SARKIS. THEY BOTH DOUBTED THAT IT WOULD HAVE MUCH EFFECT. THEY WERE NOT PREPARED TO GIVE A DEFINITIVE ANSWER HOWEVER.

9. SECRETARY SAID AUGMENTATION PROPOSAL WAS LESS CLEARCUT THAN THE IDEA OF A BUFFER FORCE. BOUTROS ASKED IF ISRAELIS WOULD ACCEPT UN FORCE ALONG BORDER ONLY (AN APPARENT REFERENCE TO BEGIN'S REMARK IT SHOULD COVER AREA UP TO LITANI). SECRETARY SAID HE DID NOT KNOW. ISRAELIS SAID THEY FELT AN AFFINITY FOR THE CHRISTIANS, WHO WERE OUTNUMBERED. THEY WOULD NOT STAND BY AND LET THEM BE SLAUGHTERED. ISRAELIS HAD FELT THAT A UN FORCE

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MIGHT BE A USEFUL WAY OF PROVIDING NEEDED PROTECTION TO
CHRISTIANS.

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10. BOUTROS ASKED HOW DEEP INTO LEBANON ISRAELIS FELT FORCE MUST BE STATIONED. SECRETARY SAID HE WOULD HAVE TO DISCUSS WITH DAYAN. BEGIN HAD BEEN UNWILLING TO DISCUSS THIS WHEN IN THE STATES. HE SUSPECTED, HOWEVER, ISRAELIS WOULD MAINTAIN POSITION THAT UN FORCES WOULD HAVE TO OCCUPY POSITIONS WELL WITHIN LEBANON AS WELL AS ON THE BORDER IN ORDER TO BE EFFECTIVE.

11. SECRETARY ASKED WHAT BOUTROS THOUGHT CHANCES WERE OF HAVING LEBANESE FORCES IN PLACE IN SOUTH DURING NEXT COUPLE OF MONTHS. BOUTROS SAID IT WOULD DEPEND ON CONDITIONS. FIRST POINT WAS THAT ARMY COULD NOT GO DOWN THERE TO FIGHT. IF, ON OTHER HAND, IT WAS TO MOVE INTO VACATED POSITIONS AND MAINTAIN ORDER, THEY MIGHT BE ABLE TO START IN TWO WEEKS WITH TWO BATTALIONS. END OF FIRST CONVERSATION WITH BOUTROS.

12. CONVERSATION WITH SARKIS. PRESIDENT ASKED SECRETARY IF THERE WAS ANYTHING THE LATTER WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT THE SOUTH BEFORE HE CALLED THE PRIME MINISTER IN TO JOIN THEM IN THE MEETING. SECRETARY SAID WE WERE DEEPLY CONCERNED WITH PROBLEM OF SOUTH. HOW COULD IT BE CONTROLLED AND FIGHTING STOPPED? ONE SUGGESTION RAISED SOMETIME EARLIER WAS THAT OF UN FORCE.
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BEGIN HAD INDICATED THAT ISRAELI POSITION HAD CHANGED AND THEY WOULD NOW FAVOR SOME SORT OF UN FORCE AS A STABILIZING INFLUENCE. BEGIN HAD NOT SPECIFIED WHAT HE THOUGHT IN TERMS OF UN TROOPS BEING BORDER FORCE OR FORCE IN INTERIOR. HE HAD NOT HAD DAYAN WITH HIM AND SO WAS TALKING IN GENERALITIES. SECRETARY CONTINUED THAT WE FELT IF LEBANESE LIKED IDEA IT WAS A CONSTRUCTIVE PROPOSAL AND WE WOULD SUPPORT IT. WALDHEIM INDICATED THAT IF THE PARTIES WERE WILLING TO PROCEED WITH IDEA HE THOUGHT IT HAD A GOOD CHANCE OF SUCCESS IN THE UN CONTEXT. WE RECOGNIZED NEED FOR PRECISION ON SUCH QUESTIONS AS NATURE OF FORCE, BUT KEY WAS WHAT GOL DECIDED WAS PROPER AND NECESSARY FROM ITS OWN POINT OF VIEW. WE WOULD THINK THAT DURING PERIOD WHEN LEBANON WAS BUILDING UP ITS OWN ARMY A UN PRESENCE MIGHT BE A USEFUL ADJUNCT. THE PRESIDENT SAID HE WOULD LIKE TO KHOW WHAT ISRAEL WOULD ACCEPT BEFORE MAKING UP HIS OWN MIND. THE SECRETARY SAID HE WOULD TALK TO ISRAELIS AND FIND OUT. END OF CONVERSATION WITH THE PRESIDENT.

13. DURING RIDE FROM PALACE BACK TO AIRPORT SECRETARY GAVE BOUTROS ACCOUNT OF HIS CONVERSATION ON SUBJECT WITH PRESIDENT. BOUTROS REITERATED IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING WHAT SYRIANS AND ISRAELIS FELT. HE HOPED WE WOULD BE ABLE TO GET SOME INDICATION FROM SYRIANS BUT HAD TOLD ATHERTON IT IMPORTANT WE NOT GIVE SYRIANS IMPRESSION LEBANESE HAD ACCEPTED OR PROPOSED FORCE. THIS WAS A SENSITIVE QUESTION FOR THE SYRIANS. SINCE QUESTION HAD COME UP AT SECRETARY'S PRESS CONFERENCE AND WAS ALREADY IN THE AIR, HE SUGGESTED WE JUST ASK SYRIANS WHAT THEY THOUGHT AND SAY WE HAD DISCUSSED IT WITH LEBANESE WHO NEED MORE DETAILS AND TIME TO REFLECT.

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14. COMMENT: TO REVIEW THE BIDDING:

A. LEBANESE ARE PROCEEDING WITH PLANS FOR DESPATCH OF LEBANESE FORCE TO SOUTH. THEIR TWO-WEEK DEADLINE LOOKS UNREALISTIC TO US, PARTICULARLY GIVEN FACT BOTH ARMY COMMANDER AND CHIEF OF INTELLIGENCE HAVE TOLD DATT THEY NEEDED TWO MONTHS FOR THIS PURPOSE.

B. LEBANESE ARE ALSO INTERESTED IN IDEA OF UN FORCE BUT NEED MORE PRECISION AS TO SYRIAN AND ISRAELI POSITIONS. QUESTION OF DEPTH OF FORCE IS COMPLICATED. BOUTROS HAD ADMITTED TO ME PRIVATELY THAT HE WOULD

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WELCOME IDEA OF FORCE WHICH WOULD OCCUPY ALL OF SOUTH LEBANON BELOW LITANI BUT DOES NOT SEE HOW THIS CAN BE MADE POLITICALLY ACCEPTABLE TO WHAT PRESIDENT SARKIS REFERRED TO AS "OUR ARAB PARTNERS."

C. WHETHER IN TWO WEEKS OR TEN, ABILITY OF LEBANESE TO FIELD AN EFFECTIVE FORCE IS STILL MOOT. ANY FORCE THEY WILL BE ABLE TO SEND ANY TIME IN THE NEAR FUTURE WILL BE ABLE TO FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY, AS BOUTROS NOTES, ONLY IF THE PLO AND THE ISRAELIS AND CHRISTIANS RESPECT A CEASE-FIRE. WE CANNOT COUNT UPON LEBANESE TROOPS TO FORCE COMPLIANCE.

D. IN THIS REGARD LEBANESE ARE STILL WAITING TO HEAR WHETHER ISRAELIS ACCEPT A CEASE-FIRE.
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